# **Introduction and Plan Summary**

### **Background**

The Town of Amesbury is a suburban community in northeastern Massachusetts with a unique industrial and manufacturing history. First settled by Europeans in 1645, the town's earliest industries included mills, shipyards and a heavily used ferry operation across the Merrimac River to Newburyport. Agriculture was secondary to an aggressive maritime and industrial economy that included shipbuilding, shipping and fishing. By the 19th century, however, textiles, ironworks, and the saw and gristmills that had been established along the Powow River, supplanted these maritime industries.

Carriages for horse and buggy were one of Amesbury's chief products until the 20th century, when the carriage mills converted their production facilities into plants for making automobile bodies. Until the Great Depression of 1929, auto body making was a major industry in the town.

Today, Amesbury's convenient location at the crossroads of I-95 and I-495, just 43 miles north of Boston, has made the town attractive to both residential and commercial development. Due to economic shifts in recent decades, Amesbury has continued to move away from the typical mill town employment base toward a more suburban employment structure, with increasing emphasis on service related employment. Amesbury benefits economically from this association and is well positioned to absorb economic growth. The Town has excellent access to both the Boston and Southern New Hampshire market areas and has the land to accommodate new commercial development. More importantly, however, Amesbury's residential growth in recent years continues to be dramatic, demonstrating the potential for continued economic recovery.

The town's population today is just under 16,500. Some major trends in the past decades have included a high rate of growth which led to the development of a bylaw to limit the annual rate of residential development. Another focus for the Town has been to ensure a sufficient supply of affordable housing in order to comply with Executive Order 418. At the same time, efforts are being made to ensure a diverse housing stock to accommodate a wide range of income levels and lifestyles. There have been major strides over the last decade to revitalize the downtown, including redeveloping vacant mill space, making facade improvements, and updating all downtown infrastructure and public amenities.

Another significant development initiative has been the Route 150 Gateway project, also known as "Terrasphere," with a major public/private effort to maximize the development potential along the south side of I-495 at Route 150. It is anticipated that development in this area will shape a large portion of the town's future employment and housing opportunities. The town has approved an artisan live-work overlay zoning district to encourage the redevelopment of older mill buildings for expansion of cultural economic development opportunities and to provide additional affordable housing in the downtown area. Amesbury's government is working in partnership with artists and craftspeople to encourage redevelopment in line with Town's historic craftsman and artistic heritage.

As strong regional growth pressures continue and as more jobs are created along the I-495 and I-95 corridors, there will be greater pressure on Amesbury as a residential location. As the residential base of the community expands, there will be greater demand for local services which will in turn expand and broaden the economy. With proper use of its natural setting and links to attractions in the region, Amesbury will grow, diversify and expand to the benefit of its residents and natural resources.

From a community data profile prepared by the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) as part of a state required buildout analysis, the Town has projected figures showing significant increases in population, students and households. The impact of these projections on developable land, buildable floor area, water demand, solid waste and roadway miles could greatly affect the unique quality of life of the community, and diminish many treasured natural resource areas. To ensure that the character of the community is preserved for future generations, it is important that Town develop a comprehensive plan for preserving critical wildlife habitat areas, maintaining scenic corridors and vistas, ensuring protection of farmland and water resource areas, and, at the same time, develop a proper framework to allow opportunities to accommodate the housing, employment and service needs for future residents.

### The Master Plan Process

In the fall of 2002, the Amesbury Municipal Council established a nine member Master Plan Steering Committee (MPSC) to develop a framework to guide growth and development patterns in Amesbury over the next 20 years. The Town utilized \$30,000 of funding from the State's Executive Order 418 Community Development Plan program, and allocated additional funding to hire the consulting team of Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. (VHB), RKG Associates, Inc., Wild Water International and the MVPC to facilitate the 18 month effort to develop the Master Plan.

A key goal of the Master Plan was to ensure that the vision, goals and objectives for the future of the Town reflect the collective voice of the people who live, work and play in Amesbury through an extensive public outreach and involvement process. Supporting the MPSC were a series of Focus Groups that looked at trends and opportunities, as well as current issues and problems within selected topic areas. The Focus Groups consisted of five to seven community members with specific areas of experience and expertise, and met at least monthly to analyze data, develop a vision and goals for each Master Plan element, and to work with recommendations from the consultant team to develop a series of strategies and action items to achieve their goals.

In addition to the work of the MPSC and the Focus Groups, a series of public meetings, workshops and events were held throughout the process to solicit community input and feedback. The extensive planning process involved hundreds of residents who provided tremendous input to the MPSC and the Focus Groups regarding key issues of concern, strengths to build upon, and comments on goals, strategies and implementation actions. In addition to numerous articles in local papers and on cable television, the following events were held to encourage public outreach and to solicit community input:

	January 16 and 17, 2003	Stakeholder Interviews (over 100 people)
$\triangleright$	March 1, 2003	Open House on Assets and Liabilities (over 125 attendees)
$\triangleright$	March 22, 2003	Design workshop on Visioning (over 75 attendees)
$\triangleright$	November 22, 2003	Housing and Economic Development Forum (over 90 attendees)
$\triangleright$	January 24, 2004	"Neighborhood Gathering" on Goals and Strategies (over 150 attendees)
$\triangleright$	May 1, 2004	"Master Plan Gallery Walk" to preview the Final Plan.

In the end, over 250 Amesbury residents and stakeholders participated in the development of the Master Plan.

### **Master Plan Elements**

The Amesbury Master Plan is a document that is intended to guide the Town's actions over the next several decades. It is a policy document that is essentially a "To Do List" for achieving the community's vision for guiding future growth and development, and ensuring that the desired community character is maintained. The Master Plan provides hundreds of recommendations for all branches of the municipal government to consider, as well as ways to involve private agencies, the business community, boards and commissions, and private individuals in the Town's efforts to "Celebrate our past, create our future," which was the guiding theme developed to prepare the Plan. The Master Plan consists of the following elements:

- ➤ Land Use and Growth Management;
- Natural Resources (which supplements the Town's Open Space and Resources Protection Plan);
- ➤ Historic and Cultural Resources (which supplements the Town's Preservation Plan);
- ➤ Housing;

- Economic Development;
- ➤ Public Facilities and Infrastructure;
- ➤ Water Resources;
- ➤ Transportation; and
- ➤ Implementation.

Within each Master Plan element, background information provides a context of existing conditions and recent trends relative to the particular focus area. Included are statistics, narative descriptions, summaries of existing reports and documentation, and anecdotal information from interviews conducted with Town staff and various stakeholders. This background information is not meant to be an exhaustive account and evaluation of all that is going on in Amesbury. Rather, its purpose is to identify key issues and concerns, document trends that could shape the future, and to identify areas of opportunity for program enhancement and new initiatives.

Additionally, each Master Plan element includes a section called "Community Identified Assets and Liabilities." The assets and liabilities were identified during interviews with stakeholders when the planning process began, and were supplemented with input from the community during initial public meetings and design workshops. The intent of this work was to understand the context of what townspeople felt were Amesbury's most significant strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. As with the background information for each element, the Assets and Liabilities were not intended to be a thorough evaluation of key issues in Amesbury, but rather a tool to identify community perceptions about areas that impact their daily lives.

### Visions, Goals, Strategies and Actions

With the background information and the Community Identified Assets and Liabilities, the consultant team worked with the MPSC and the Focus Groups to prepare a framework for recommended future actions. The first part of the process was to develop a Vision Statement for each element that describes what the area of focus should "look like" in the next 20 years.

Working from the Vision and the list of key issues of concern or strenghts to build upon, the Focus Groups developed a series of generalized goal statements for each of the elements. The goals were designed to be short statements for future achievements, outlining desired future conditions in Amesbury based upon the most basic community values of general agreement. Each element contains a series of three to six goals, which constitute <a href="what">what</a> the Master Plan is intended to achieve. Following each goal is a series of strategies that the Focus Groups developed to identify <a href="how">how</a> each goal will be achieved. The strategies, while still general in nature, provide a context for further discussion and decision making to guide the town in accomplishing its collective goals and objectives.

Within each of the strategies are a series of action itemss, which are in essence the "meat" of the Master Plan. The actions include proposals for for specific projects and also identify items needing further study. The intent was to be both visionary and practical, featuring large-scale, long-term projects that will have substantial impacts along with smaller tasks that are readily achievable and therefore important for sustaining a sense of accomplishment and momentum. The actions were developed by the Focus Groups with technical information and recommendations from the consultant team, along with extensive input from Town staff and department heads, meetings with community stakeholders and a series of public and neighborhood meetings in the fall of 2003 and spring of 2004.

### Implementation

Throughout the process of developing the Master Plan, one topic continuously emerged that reflected the community's commitment to the process: the Master Plan should not be a document that "just sits on the shelf." To ensure that this would not be the case, the consultant team worked with the MPSC and the Focus Groups to develop an Implementation Schedule to provide a framework to monitor the progress of the recommended actions. The Implementation Schedule identifies those parties responsible for assuming the lead in achieving the actions, a potential time frame and sequencing schedule for the actions, potential costs and potential community benefits to help prioritize actions, and potential funding sources to help implement the actions.

Developing the Implementation Schedule was the most critical part of preparing the Master Plan, and required numerous discussions with Town staff, elected officials and other key stakeholders to ensure that the actions idenfitied by the consultants and the Focus Groups were realistic and achievable given the identified time frames. A key item of note regarding the Implementation Schedule is that it is meant to be a "fluid document," a work in progress to be monitored by the Master Plan Implementation and Oversight Committee and the Office of Community and Economic Development, to add to and update, and to provide information on project schedules and progress.

It is also important to note that with regard to implementation of the actions for the different Master Plan Elements, each item should be read and considered on its own, as well as in its relationship to the other sections. Because the Master Plan has some built-in redundancy to it (that is, certain actions appear in more than one element), it demonstrates that the whole document is the sum of its parts. For example, recommended actions for housing or economic development initiatives are highly dependent upon actions and recommendations within the transportation or public facilities elements.

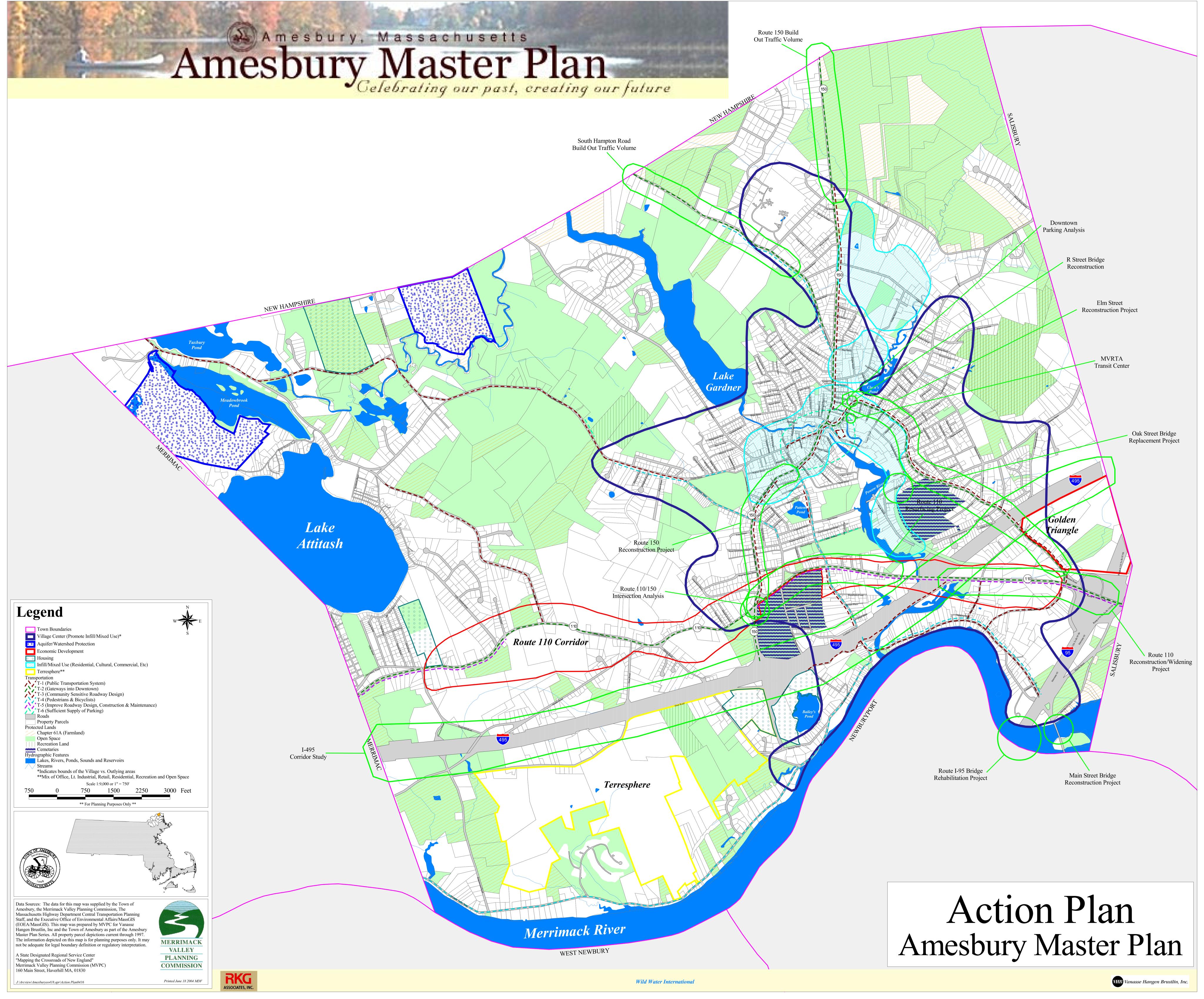
Finally, while the Implementation Schedule specifies recommendated tasks and action items, it is not intended that these items should be followed through "as is."

Especially for actions that may have a significant impact for Town finances, which were determined to have a high priority at the time the Master Plan was adopted, may not be as high of a priority at the time they are implemented. Similarly, actions that recommend specific methods for achieving a task may not have the staffing or available resources available within the recommended time frame, or additional technical resources may be available that would provide a totally different mechanism for achieving the same goal. The purpose of the document is to provide a framework for future decision making, a document that outtlines the community's goals and objectives for their future. Therefore, the Master Plan should be utilized for ongoing discussion, with continuous updating and monitoring by the Master Plan Implementation and Oversight Committee and the Office of Community and Economic Development.

### **Amesbury Master Plan Summary**

The Amesbury Master Plan contains hundreds of recommendations and proposed actions. The MPSC and the Focus Groups believe that the Town should not rely on a few big ideas to achieve its vision, but rather should cover the diversity of the community's needs and interests, and encourage the continued participation and personal enrichment of all of its residents and stakeholders. Additionally, lessons learned from other communities with successful plans suggest that momentum and long term sustainability comes from having projects with a broad range of sizes and significance provide ongoing opportunities to demonstrate advancement. Accomplishing and celebrating along the way is the true measure for keeping the Amesbury Master Plan an active and living document, and will ensure continued and ongoing community participation and ownership.

The following sections summarize the goals and strategies for each of the Amesbury Master Plan. The particular actions are listed within each element of the Master Plan, and are detailed in the Implementation Schedule. The Action Plan map on the following page provides an image of Amesbury's future land use and development patters based upon implementation of the recommended action items.



### **Amesbury's Vision Statement**

### "Celebrating Our Past, Creating Our Future"

"Celebrating our past, creating our future" is the guiding principle for shaping a collective vision for the City of Amesbury in the year 2020. The Amesbury community recognizes the importance of honoring our heritage and the significance of historic structures and cultural roots of the City. This includes the mill, shipbuilding, Native American, and agricultural eras of the community. We want to build upon the past by reinforcing a sense of belonging to an open and accepting community with outstanding natural and cultural resources. And in honor of the City's origin, we wish to cultivate a prosperous community with a diversified economic tax base where civic involvement is an integral part of a valued quality of life.

Our vision is to preserve the classic New England Village character and heritage that currently exists in Amesbury, while accommodating growth in a manner that is well controlled and appropriate to meet the needs of the community. One vehicle to ensure a reasonable pattern of growth is the Master Plan, which will be actively used as a guide for making decisions based upon the community's collectively identified needs and desires.

### Land Use and Growth Management Element

LU-1	Preserve the unique identity of Amesbury's neighborhoods; strengthen linkages between all neighborhoods, and their relationship to Amesbury's village center.
LU-1.1	Continue to develop incentives to reuse historic buildings in the village center, especially mill sites and other buildings which reflect Amesbury's industrial heritage. See also Public Facilities and Infrastructure, Goal 2
LU-1.2	Encourage the clean-up and reuse of existing brownfield sites.
LU-1.3	Encourage reinvestment in established older neighborhoods to enhance and preserve neighborhood character.  See also Public Facilities and Infrastructure, Goal 2
LU-2	Promote growth and development within the downtown business district to encourage a vibrant mixed use environment.
LU-2.1	Plan and promote redevelopment of the Lower Millyard, including the area's integration with the surrounding downtown center. See also Economic Development, Goal 2
LU-2.2	Provide additional public gathering spaces and recreational amenities in the downtown. See also Transportation, Goal 4, and Natural Resources, Goal 2
LU-2.3	Create a critical mass of downtown residents to support commercial establishments in a revitalized downtown area.

LU-2.4	Promote methods to attract and sustain a variety of commercial uses in the downtown area to provide goods and services for residents and visitors.	
LU-2.5	Reinforce the DRC Committee's role in the advisory process for review of projects in the downtown.	
LU-3	Manage growth and development in outlying areas to preserve Amesbury's environmental and cultural resources consistent with the Town's historic New England village character.	
LU-3.1	Evaluate existing regulatory measures and consider new techniques to manage development in outlying areas.  See also Natural Resources, Goal 2, and Public Facilities and Infrastructure, Goal 1	
LU-3.2	Plan for appropriate long range commercial and industrial development in suitable areas.	
LU-4	Improve the Town's administrative capacity to manage growth and development.	
LU-4.1	Address the need for better enforcement of regulations. See also Public Facilities and Infrastructure, Goal 3	
LU-4.2	Improve local administrative capacity to manage growth.	

### **Natural Resources Element**

NR-1	Protect existing natural features in all new development.
NR-1.1	Develop zoning requirements that ensure new development will blend carefully with existing natural features.
NR-2	Preserve and enhance open space and natural resources.
NR-2.1	Explore new avenues to ensure that larger tracts of open space and other natural environments are preserved and maintained.
NR-2.2	Develop programs to enhance existing areas of natural resources and promote environmental protection.
NR-3	Create greater public awareness about the natural resources, open spaces and recreational amenities in Amesbury.
NR-3.1	Promote activities that create an awareness of the benefits found in Amesbury's natural resources.
NR-3.2	Develop actions to improve recreational opportunities.

### **Historic and Cultural Resources Element**

HCR-1	Provide a coordinated approach to protecting and promoting cultural and historic resources.	
HCR-1.1	Minimize duplication of efforts through improved communication and coordination and maximize cooperation on important preservation initiatives.	
HCR-1.2	Preserve open space and prevent the unnecessary demolition of historic properties.	
HCR-2	Proactively protect important architecturally significant buildings and important sites that depict the Town's history.	
HCR-2.1	Actively pursue initiatives to document and protect historic resources.	
HCR-2.2	Preserve the historic resources of downtown as part of larger revitalization effort.	
HCR-2.3	Preserve the historic and architectural integrity of Amesbury's neighborhoods.	
HCR-2.4	Preserve Amesbury's historic landscapes.	

HCR-3	Build upon the unique cultural resources within Amesbury to encourage greater interaction within the community and to promote attractions for visitors.
HCR-3.1	Preserve the identity of our community and prevent the town from turning into a bedroom commuter suburb.
HCR-3.2	Promote local arts and cultural resources to reinforce the importance of personal expression and enrichment.

# **Housing Element**

H-1	Provide and maintain economically diverse housing while meeting the State's Chapter 40B requirements.
H-1.1	Meet the Chapter 40B ten percent affordable housing criteria (150 to 200 additional certified units) by 2009.
H-1.2	Maintain 10 percent of Amesbury's housing stock as affordable units in perpetuity.
H-1.3	Address the needs of a significant number of households who are potentially at risk in their ability to afford quality housing in Amesbury.
H-2	Promote a mixed-use environment in the downtown area to ensure a vibrant community during the day, evening and on weekends.
H-2.1	Encourage and foster "mixed use" zoning in the downtown area encompassing both commercial and residential components. See also Land Use Goal 2.
H-3	Encourage and maintain an assorted mix of housing types in various locations throughout the Town by supporting development that provides for households of all income levels.
H-3.1	Ensure a wide range of housing types to provide different housing options for a diverse mix of lifestyles and household incomes.
H-3.2	Encourage all developments to include affordable housing to ensure it will continue to be well integrated throughout the community.
H-3.3	Support the establishment of nonprofit entities that promote affordable housing.
H-4	Ensure fair housing opportunities throughout the town.

# **Economic Development Element**

ED-1	Promote Amesbury as an attractive, supportive and business friendly community.
ED-1.1	Facilitate and foster a supportive environment for small, home-based, and startup businesses.
ED-1.2	Retain the diversity of local employers while meeting the employment needs of the business community and local residents.
ED-1.3	Encourage a climate of positive collaboration between the Town and the Alliance for Amesbury and other organizations that contribute to economic development.
ED-2	Continue to create opportunities for business development and job creation initiatives.
ED-2.1	Promote further downtown revitalization through mixed uses, adaptive reuse of older buildings, and coordinated cultural programming.
ED-2.2	Encourage appropriate mixed-use development projects on previously identified potential sites in order to grow Amesbury's employment and tax base. See also Land Use Goals 1 and 3.
ED-2.3	➤ Implement a focused business Retention and Expansion (R&E) strategy for the downtown

ED-3	Build upon the unique cultural resources within Amesbury as an economic development catalyst and a source of community identity.	
ED-3.1	Establish a central yet collaborative program for promoting the culture and arts in Amesbury.	
ED-3.2	Develop a comprehensive portfolio of data highlighting Amesbury's historic and current cultural resources and make this portfolio easily accessible to and usable by a large audience, including marketers, planners, and buyers.	
ED-3.3	Support the use of public and private space in Amesbury for cultural and arts-related purposes	
ED-4	Position Amesbury to take advantage of business expansion and growth opportunities	
ED-4.1	Provide mechanisms to monitor economic trends and to promote the incorporation of those trends into the Town's economic development initiatives.	
ED-4.2	Provide a full complement of local development tools to attract and plan for economic development opportunities. See also Land Use Goal 4	

## **Public Facilities and Infrastructure Element**

PFI-1	Enforce regulatory policies that protect environmentally sensitive areas, conserve critical resources and minimize risks to public health and safety.
PFI-1.1	Protect outlying areas and critical natural resource areas from unmanaged growth by ensuring provisions of infrastructure are sufficiently dealt with. See also Land Use, Goal 3 and Natural Resources, Goal 2
PFI-1.2	Provide all departments with an updated operational Watershed Management Plan for public water supply quantity management.
PFI-1.3	Prepare and implement a written policy for dam inspections, maintenance and repair. Educate staff on all aspects of dam operation and requirements as it applies to the Water Management Plan.
PFI-1.4	Prepare a Facilities Plan for the Water Supply System that details existing water supply needs, future expected needs, and Water Treatment Plant upgrade requirements.
PFI-1.5	Develop a policy for addressing water quality concerns backed up by procedures for implementing water quality protection efforts.
PFI-1.6	Develop a unified program, procedure or policy for all departments regarding storm water management in the Town to identify management requirements and funding needs in accordance with Federal EPA Regulations.
PFI-2	Encourage and sustain economic growth in commercial and industrial districts in the village center through suitable infrastructure development.
PFI-2.1	Provide a sufficient supply and capacity of utilities and infrastructure services to meet current and future needs.  See also Land Use, Goal 1 and Transportation, Goal 4
PFI-3	Provide new avenues for generating funds to help meet infrastructure development costs.
PFI-3.1	Explore different options for ensuring improved public services and amenities.
PFI-3.2	Monitor future rezoning on a town wide basis to determine the effects on public infrastructure.
PFI-4	Enhance the technical and administrative capacity of municipal government to manage infrastructure development and maintenance in town.
PFI-4.1	Develop new methods to coordinate the delivery of public services.
PFI-4.2	Integrate the Public Works Department to accurately address water management issues and understand and implement water management activities and policies.
PFI-4.3	Provide documentation and resources to all Town departments on a regular basis.
PFI-5	Support development of public facilities to meet long-term community service and educational needs.
PFI-5.1	Upgrade public buildings and Town Offices to provide updated facilities for improved public services.

# **Transportation Element**

T-1	Provide a viable public transportation system that includes access to all modes of travel.
T-1.1	Identify and respond to needs and demands by expanding public transportation services.
T-2	Incorporate safe and attractive "gateways" into downtown Amesbury.
T-2.1	Maintain or improve Amesbury's "gateway" roadways to improve aesthetic qualities, safety conditions and traffic operations. The "gateway" roadways include Route 110, Route 150, Elm Street, Friend Street, and South Hampton Road.
T-2.2	Use gateway treatments (traffic calming measures) to alert motorists that they are entering neighborhoods or areas with high levels of pedestrian activity where responsible driving is necessary.
T-3	Provide community sensitive roadway design policies that promote safe and peaceful neighborhoods.
T-3.1	Investigate options to reduce the speed, noise, and volume of traffic on Amesbury's neighborhood roads.
T-4	Ensure a safe environment for pedestrians and bicyclists.
T-4.1	Provide safe and convenient connections between neighborhoods, schools, parks and open space areas, commercial areas and other resources located near the downtown area. See also Public Facilities and Infrastructure Goal 2.1.
T-4.2	Enhance resources for bicyclists for both recreational and commuting purposes.
T-5	Establish measures and policies to improve roadway design, construction, and maintenance to provide a safe and efficient flow of traffic on key roadways.
T-5.1	Reduce traffic congestion and traffic safety problems at locations within the community while preserving the character of roadways and neighborhoods.
T-5.2	Promote enhanced access management tools and techniques to mitigate congestion and improve safety along roadways.
T-5.3	Utilize innovative roadway design and construction methods to maximize efficiency.
T-5.4	➤ Guarantee coordination of major transportation and public works projects.
T-6	Provide a sufficient supply of parking in mixed-use or commercial areas.
T-6.1	Ensure that there is adequate downtown parking areas that are safe, convenient and easy to find.
T-6.2	➤ Provide sufficient parking in outlying areas.